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ABSTRACT

The way in which the University of South Florida (USF) developed its Open University is discussed in this report. Implemented in 1972, the Open University meets the needs of working students, many of whom live a considerable distance from one of the campuses. Annual enrollment today exceeds 7,000, and the pattern of growth indicates a need for programs that can deliver courses to students at home or in the work place instead of requiring attendance in a traditional on-campus class. The USF experience shows that distance learning procedures can provide an effective alternative to traditional forms of instruction in terms of student satisfaction, content mastery, and cost effectiveness. Delivery systems include print materials, television and radio programs, audio and video tapes, computers, and video disks. Recommendations for institutions planning to implement such a program include the following: acquire or produce courses that effectively make use of a variety of media; supply plenty of carefully prepared print materials; have carefully structured workbooks that require students to perform activities based on their viewing and reading; maintain office hours for students to visit professors; and establish study groups. (SM)

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## AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

Abstract

This document describes how one state university uses a variety of procedures to meet the needs of working students, many of whom live a considerable distance from one of the university's campuses.

Delivery systems include print materials television and radio programs, audio and video tapes, computers and video discs.

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The University of South Florida located in one of the fastest growing regions of the United States is faced with rapid growth, a widely dispersed primarily commuting student population and relatively static funding, the University has explored a variety of innovative procedures to meet student needs within a designated service area that is slightly larger than the Netherlands. The primary campus is located in Tampa with other campuses in St. Petersburg, Sarasota, Fort Myers, and Lakeland.

*Comparison of Size: The Netherlands and the Service Area of the University of South Florida*

One approach, The Open University, was implemented in 1972 with an enrollment of sixty-four students in two courses. Today the annual enrollment exceeds seven thousand; a pattern of growth that indicates the need for programs that can deliver courses to students at home or in the work place

instead of requiring attendance in a traditional on campus class. A large number of students at the University of South Florida commute to classes. The majority of them work; many in full time positions. For them, taking a course is much more than walking from a dorm to a classroom. It may involve a fifteen or thirty mile drive.

The growth of the Open University indicates the need for alternative delivery systems for today's students. The procedures developed at USF may prove useful for other schools considering this process as a means of meeting the needs of their students. The USF experience indicates that distance learning procedures can provide an effective alternative to traditional forms of instruction in terms of student satisfaction and content mastery as well as cost-effectiveness.

To many American Educators, the terms "distance learning" and "television" are nearly synonymous. In reality, no single medium can be considered the best way to deliver course content. While television programs and print materials are most often used in

distant learning, radio, computers, audio and video tapes should be incorporated as part of the media mix when appropriate. Television programs have traditionally been the major carrier of course content for distance learners in the United States and this is also true at the Open University at the University of South Florida. However this is not true with distant learning programs in other countries where, in many cases, the information delivered via television comprises less than ten percent of the total course content. Since the cost of producing or leasing television programs usually constitutes the largest single cost of developing a course, the Open University, at U.S.F., is looking for ways of reducing the number of television programs required and examining other means of information delivery. Television programs are useful to introduce a course, motivate learners to stay on schedule and to continue the course and to carry information that can not be readily explained in print or with audio programs. Nationally, the heavy dependency of television remains largely unabated. Although in a few instances courses are being designed that are less dependant on this medium.

At the University of South Florida, future courses will be less television intensive when this reduction can be made without damaging the integrity of the course. Recent innovations such as computers and video discs appear promising and should be considered to supplant or supplement television programs. The Open University conducted a three semester study, using computers as a communication tool and demonstrated that the process could enable students to effectively communicate with their professor via this medium. Quizzes were taken anc scored almost instaneously. Incorrect answers generated prescriptions that would lead to correct responses.

Currently, two video disc experiments are underway. When completed, students at a number of remote sites will be able to work at their own pace to complete their courses. The initial costs of a video disc course are relatively high but after the discs are mastered the low cost of reproducing them makes the use of numerous learning sites feasible.

Institutions of higher learning, in which distance learning is in a formative state, would do

well to consider acquiring or producing courses that effectively make use of a variety of media. Audio tapes, which can be broadcast or inexpensively duplicated and sold or loaned to students have proven to be successful substitutes for television. A number of televised courses are essentially little more than audio programs; many show one or more people talking with the occasional interspersion of pictures. Such courses can be offered in audio format at a much lower cost and with no reduction in effectiveness. At the other end of the spectrum are television programs filled with visual imagery that boggles the mind and often distracts from the instructional content. "Audio only" might also be a better choice for those programs.

No matter what electronic medium is used, one constant is the need of carefully prepared print materials. Experience has shown that the satisfaction and grades of distant learners are related to how closely the text and study guide correlates with the other instructional materials. Persons evaluating a course should pay particular attention to the print components. Were they specifically prepared to be used with the television

or audio programs or were the programs based on existing materials? Either alternative is satisfactory. Problems are usely encountered if a text is selected "off of the shelf" after the other components were produced. When evaluating a course, an examination of program titles and chapter headings provides a quick means of initial assessment. If they coincide, it indicates that at least some thought was given to integrating the materials.

An admitted weakness of telecourses is the lack of interaction. Carefully structured workbooks that require students to perform activities based on their viewing and reading can overcome much of this problem. Reviewers should give as much care to examining the workbook as the other media. The assignments should be clearly stated because a confused student may have difficulty contacting a professor. The assignments should be meaningful and interesting. Nothing demoralizes students more than work that they consider meaningless.

Students taking telecourses are, in many ways, no different than their peers taking traditional

classes. They have questions and comments for their professors and provisions must be made to accommodate these needs. Professors must maintain office hours for telecourses as they do for other classes and a number of on-campus meeting should be scheduled to discuss important elements of the course and answer student questions.

The Open University helps students establish study groups for each course by compiling lists of students who want to join a group. Because of today's emphasis on privacy, it is advisable to have a signed permission slip, from each student, giving permission to list their name, address and phone number.

Those involved with distance learning should realize that the process is not greeted with universal enthusiasm by faculty and administrators. There are a number of reasons for this including distrust of innovation and the fear of technological unemployment. It should be noted that not all the Luddites died out in the nineteenth century. With this in mind, it administrators of distance learning

to have a broad base of faculty and administrators involved in evaluating courses. The initial determinations to produce or lease a course. Elements to be assessed should include, but are not limited to, television and/or audio programming, and print components. In the case of a course produced elsewhere, it is useful to talk to instructors at schools already offering the course, availability, knowledge, and helpfulness.

To those first considering the implementation of distance learning, it may seem a Herculean task. It is true that careful planning is required but once the program is operating, and assuming that deadlines are met, the work load is not dissimilar from other university programs. The Open University at the University of South Florida operates a multi-campus program, with an annual enrollment of over seven thousand, with a staff of three full time people and part time persons who register students at the other campuses. Student, faculty and external evaluations repeatedly indicate that the program is highly successful in its mission of providing learning opportunities for students who would otherwise find it difficult to attend classes.